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Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland, by Eagle Glassheim. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. ix + 275 pp. \$28.95 US (paperback).

The Sudetenland, as the German-speaking Czechoslovak borderlands were known, did not have a good twentieth century. On the wrong side in the First World War, the territory lost out to Franco-Czech interests at Versailles and was assigned to the new Czechoslovak state. In 1938, Hitler's pan-German demands led to the Munich agreement that reassigned it to Germany. As part of the Third Reich for the duration of the Second World War, it shared Germany's defeat in 1945. After the war, about 3 million German speakers, mostly women and children, were forcibly expelled from the Czechoslovak borderlands in retaliatory 'national cleansing'.

Eagle Glassheim's *Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland* focuses most of its attention on the little-known story of what happened next. German Bohemian and Moravian refugees, regarded as human vermin, were disinfected with DDT powder before being placed in West German camps. Fear that they carried the 'cultural virus' of 'unrooted' peoples combined with panic that they might carry contagious diseases such as typhus. 'Dear God, send the vermin back,/Send them home to Czechoslovakia' prayed one Stuttgart resident. (p. 75)

The Sudetenland, remembered by expelled Germans as the quintessentially romantic *Heimat* (homeland) rooted in the 'natural, religious and architectural landscape' (p. 120), continued to be watched with a sense of longing and grievance from the other side of the Iron Curtain. 'Expellee politics in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s', as Glassheim reminds us, 'remained fixated on lost homelands and demands for return' (p. 85). Meanwhile, and despite campaigns by post-war Czechoslovakia's Settlement Office to 'de-Germanize' the region and reimagine it as innately Czech (pp. 102-113), the Sudetenland (in Czech *Sudety*), with its abandoned German cemeteries and buildings, remained an eerie, uncomfortable landscape. Cupping his hands to drink from a stream below an abandoned German cemetery, Bohumil Hrabal's Czech protagonist in the novel *I Served the King of England*, 'could taste the dead buried long ago in the graveyard' (p. 3) and 'rubbed shoulders with people who were invisible...'. He 'kept bumping into young girls in dirndls, into German furniture, into the ghosts of German families.... Mirrors held the imprints of the Germans who had looked into them, who had departed years ago' (p. 3).

Glassheim, like others before him (most notably Norman Naimark, Benjamin Frommer, Chad Bryant and R.M. Douglas), does not shy away from the horrors of national 'cleansing', whether of Czechs or Germans, from the *Heimat* or *domov*, a physical landscape romantically imagined as historically Teutonic or Slav. Unlike them, Glassheim further considers the relationship between this sort of 'national cleansing' and subsequent discourses about the region's health, cleanliness and modernity.

Ethnic cleansing, social engineering and intensive industrialisation combined to make the post-war *Sudety* into a place that was presented, throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s, as a land of opportunity. The Czechoslovak Communist regime reinvented the depopulated region as a California in which patriotic, adventurous Slavs were encouraged to replace absent Germans, taking over their homes and businesses, extending their industries, and helping to build a modern, productive socialist utopia. This 'productivist logic' was taken to 'extreme ends' in northern Bohemia, where the regime levelled hundreds of villages to make way for expanding coal mines'. Glassheim pays particular attention to the case of Most (formerly *Brüx*), the city that was moved in its entirety in order to mine a rich vein of coal underneath. Between 1961 and 1986, 'the government systematically destroyed the old

city center, built an ambitious modernist city to replace it, and moved close to 20,000 people into new high-rise housing' (p. 10) The result was a profound physical and social dislocation from which the region has yet to recover.

In the mid-1960s, the political and emotional atmosphere changed. In Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere, the virtues of intensive industrialization began to be doubted. A wide range of Czechs started 'publicly questioning what had gone wrong in the resettled borderlands. Pollution had gradually denuded many of the once scenic mountain summits of trees...toxic fog choked major cities and obscured the mountain views. Remoter border communities remained depopulated and isolated, and even many larger cities lacked an engaging cultural and social life' (p. 159). The state's perceived destruction of the environment became, over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, a stock criticism, as well as a symbol, of the ruling socialist elite. Dissidents complained of not being 'able to breathe' in the double sense of being monitored by the secret police and forced to breathe unclean air.

Disillusionment with the modernist project was not unique to Eastern Europe, but was also felt on the other side of the ideological divide. Glassheim, who grew up in the American mid-west in the 1970s, remembers how his father campaigned for the return of the traditional downtown that had existed before motorways cut through city centres and malls were built in the suburbs. 'Memories of a 1970s childhood steeped in nostalgia for threatened neighborhoods and face-to-face communities' enabled Glassheim to engage emotionally with German expellees 'longing for lost Heimat' and Czech settlers struggling 'to identify new coordinates of community in the borderlands'. (p. 179)

No book is perfect. Material reproduced from the author's earlier journal articles can at times seem rather awkwardly sewn together, with the stitching still visible. It is not clear that the concept 'Heimat deficit' contributes much to our understanding of ethnic cleansing. It would have been good to hear more about places other than Most, the city whose church was physically moved in 1975 'in a triumph of Communist engineering' (p. 123). But these are all minor criticisms.

Cleansing the Borderlands is an engaging, well-researched and thought-provoking book. Its originality lies chiefly in the intertwining of environmental and health studies with more conventional political approaches to the subject of ethnic cleansing. Especially refreshing is its stress on the parallels, rather than differences, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This is a book that will find a welcome place on many undergraduate and postgraduate reading lists.

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(1,000 words)